

UCSF CENTER ON DEAFNESS

Using a Mental Health Interpreter

What to Expect

Certification and Experience

For mental health settings, it is recommended that interpreters be licensed, or certified. Currently, accepted certifications are awarded by either the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) or the National Association of the Deaf (NAD).

Certification assures a *minimum skill level* of the interpreter. Experience in mental health settings is recommended, especially within the particular type of service you will be providing. This is important since the role of an interpreter in the mental health setting is different than that of the private practice or staff interpreter.

Interpreters are prepared to show proof of their certification and to discuss their experience. This information is also on file and available in advance from the interpreter referral agency.

Before and After an Appointment

Pre- and post-sessions with the interpreter are recommended. A few minutes of your time provides a critical resource for effective in for effective interpreted communication. Before the session begins, you may be asked to provide the following information to the interpreter, if you have it:

- The deaf person's stated preference for language and communication method
- Discussion of the physical set-up during the session (verify with client when they arrive).
- The purpose of the visit and goals for the session.
- Previous experience with deaf and hard of hearing people and/or working with an interpreter
- Any questions you might have, including where/how to obtain further information.

Post-session time allows for a brief check-in with the interpreter, specifically about any language or communication issues occurring during the session.

Not every interpreter will be a "good fit" with every person. The experienced interpreter will self-assess their ability to continue and if needed assist you in arranging for a replacement, as early in the process as possible. Consistency of the quality of interpretation and of interpreters working in ongoing sessions is highly recommended

Role of the Interpreter

Sign language interpreters are required to follow a stringent Code of Ethics. Confidentiality is foremost and it is recommended that mental health providers will explain this to clients at the appropriate time during the first session. All of the following aspects are based on the RID Code of Ethics and the advice of experts:

Do not leave the interpreter alone with a client at any time. This will prevent the interpreter being given any information best given directly to you. Escort the interpreter to the staff lounge or office upon arrival and allow them to accompany you out of the session if you need to leave, even briefly.

Interpreters do not take on a case management role and are limited to the role of facilitating communication with you present. They do not escort clients/patients to other appointments or locations, interpret documents without staff present, or provide any supervision, monitoring or substituting for regular staff.

An interpreter is not permitted to do any editing, omissions or additions to anything said by you or the deaf person, nor adding any of their own opinions/reactions. The interpreter must stay true to the intent of all parties, matching tone and affect. If the deaf person's language is dysfluent the interpretation will reflect this. People who are dysfluent in sign language are referred to as being "highly visual".

The interpreter's presence increases the opportunity for transference. Therefore, if the deaf person addresses the interpreter directly, the mental health professional will need to intervene.

Language and Communication Method

The interpreter may need a couple of minutes at the beginning of the session to quickly assess the most readily understood language of the deaf or hard of hearing person, as there are a variety of sign languages and sign systems in use. To assist with this assessment, before the sessions begins, it is helpful to ask a few questions of a more introductory nature.

In more complex situations such as those with highly visual deaf people, if the deaf person is not from the local area, or there is more than one deaf person present, an interpreter may need more time to assess the most effective language preferences.

If a person is more "highly visual" the interpreter may choose to work in a consecutive manner instead of their usual method of interpreting at the same time you are speaking or the deaf person is signing.

The sign language interpreter may work with a spoken language interpreter if there are parties involved who do not speak English.

A Deaf person who is trained and certified as an interpreter may be called in to work as an intermediary to insure the most effective communication. This is especially recommended for situations involving in-depth assessment, testing, or where life-altering decisions will be reliant upon outcome, as well as in cases of extremely highly visual deaf persons.

Quick Tips

Introduce the interpreter to the deaf person at the beginning of the session.

When speaking, look directly at the deaf person even though their eyes may be on the interpreter much of the time.

Speak as you normally would. Some people are naturally inclined to over-enunciate or speak unnaturally slowly, which can make understanding more difficult.

Try to avoid addressing the interpreter directly during the session or including them in the session.

It is normal to experience a slight delay in the communication and response time due to the nature of interpreting.

Initial interviews may take more time than you usually allow.

Any concerns that the deaf or hard of hearing person has about the interpretation should be discussed with the interpreter present.

Giving examples and being specific is more culturally appropriate when working with people who are deaf and hard of hearing, as is being more inquisitive than you might be with a hearing person. The interpreter will rely upon you for these cultural adjustments when clinically appropriate.

Questions regarding financial considerations and concerns about the interpreter are best handled with the interpreter referral agency unless you have hired the interpreter directly.

Interpreter referral agencies and other service agencies for the deaf and hard of hearing are available for further information. An interpreter may be able to direct you to resources but cannot endorse specific programs or agencies.

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copies of the RID Code of Ethics are available on the Internet at:

www.rid.org

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